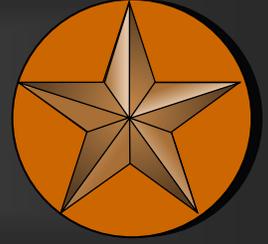




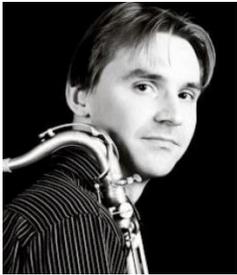
Texas Jazz Educators Association Newsletter

Highlighting Jazz Activities in the State of Texas

September 2021



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings!

Hi, my name is **Matt Sawyer**, and I am grateful to serve all of you wonderful jazz educators in Texas and beyond as the 2021-2022 TJEA president. A special thank you goes to immediate past-president and fellow board

member **Mark De Hertogh** for his leadership and service last year. The board and I are here to help you in any way we can.

Despite many of us having the toughest obstacles to overcome, it is just incredible how great things keep happening both in and away from the classroom. Despite all of the virtual auditions and virtual jazz festivals in which we participated, we can celebrate that our students participated in big numbers and found opportunities to learn and grow. 'Thank you' educators, for being there for our students and for each other. I was reminded of this and encouraged during our very well attended summer meeting at the Texas Bandmaster's Association in San Antonio.

In my quarterly message to you, there are three main focuses: **celebrations and news**, and **ways our organization can serve you**. The third focus is a longer article, *Thoughts on Teaching Jazz*, later in this newsletter. I will also share a main theme in each newsletter and this time around, it's '**momentum**'. More on that later!

Celebrations | There is so much to celebrate coming out of one of the toughest years an educator could have, and that is the first celebration: The spark is very much alive in our kids and programs! On that note, we are thrilled to announce that the TMEA Invited Jazz

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Sparky Koerner, turning a new page after 40 years teaching in Texas.

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Ensembles are **Reynolds MS - Tina Parr**, director and **Harlingen HS - Maria Coronado**, director! These are wonderful programs, students, and directors and we are excited to hear them perform live at the 2022 TMEA Convention.

Congratulations also to Vail Summer Jazz Workshop attendee, **Matthew Fu** – drums, from Houston's **Kinder HSPVA - Warren Sneed**, director.

News | Our board is excited to announce that we will hold our first ever composition contest. We highly encourage your students to enter! Stay tuned for details to be released very soon. We also encourage you to apply for **TJEA Grants**. The application is due by October 1, 2021.

Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI), spearheaded by **Dr. Sarah Roberts**, will meet quarterly on the second Sunday of the month via Zoom, with the next meeting occurring October 11 at 2:00 PM.

Save the date, Wednesday, February 9th on your calendar for our annual Symposium, spearheaded by President-elect **Matt Hedrick** — live in San Antonio — and be there for morning and afternoon clinics, conversation, and camaraderie.

The Texas All-State and Region Jazz process is well under way! Returning 'live' are the region-level rounds with the All-State jazz round submitted as recordings. All-State judging will occur remotely with panels represented from across the state. <https://tjia.org/resources/tmea-all-state-jazz/> is an incredible resource for your students for practicing. To purchase the All-State audition materials [Click HERE](#). Please reach out to me, mattsawyermusic@gmail.com or matthew.sawyer@fwisd.org, or anyone else on the board, if you have questions about the process or how to find resources and workshops to help you and your students.

Encourage your students to take jazz lessons. Encourage them to attend as many workshops and events as possible to meet and hear other like-minded individuals. This intense, short window of time is over before you know it, so embrace this moment while you can. It can really kick off an amazing year for your program. **Momentum** is the word!

Ways our organization can serve you | We are thrilled to have a board this year that has representation across many grade levels of jazz education. Representing middle schools are **Mark De Hertogh**, **Matt Hedrick** (TJEA president-elect), and **James Cook** (TJEA secretary); high school – myself and board of directors **Preston Pierce** and **Warren Sneed**; college – our treasurer and webmaster **Heather Mensch**, **Dr. Sarah Roberts** (over TJEA Social Media and DEI), and our TJEA Executive Director **Alex Parker**. These individuals do a great deal for jazz education in Texas and are experienced at teaching jazz at all grade levels. We want to hear from you! What are your ideas and how can we help you?

Thank you for what you do in your own individual classrooms day-to-day to make jazz a deep part of your students' curriculum. As John Lewis said, "The reward for playing jazz is - playing jazz." Other rewards come in the short- and long-term as your students develop a love for this great music — and it will be for life! **Momentum** is the word!

Remember to reach out if myself or the TJEA board can help you in any way. It is an honor serving this year, and together, we can grow jazz education in Texas and...everywhere! Have a great year!

Sincerely,
Matt Sawyer

Tarleton Jazz Program Adds World-Class Faculty

The ever-growing Tarleton jazz program is part of Tarleton State University and has three large jazz ensembles, jazz combos, a Latin Ensemble, and several jazz courses. The annual Tarleton Jazz Festival occurs every spring in April, bringing bands from all over the state to perform and get feedback from nationally respected jazz educators, concluding with an awards concert featuring a nationally/internationally renowned guest artist and the Tarleton Jazz Ensemble. **Dr. Andrew Stonerock** is the Head of Jazz Studies at Tarleton State University.

The Tarleton jazz program has grown over the summer adding world-class faculty. Joining the program this year will be **Connor Kent** - drum set, **Carlos Averhoff, Jr.** - saxophone, **Paul Birk** – trombone, and **Eric Hitt** - bass.

Connor Kent's “compelling groove” (Downbeat Magazine) has taken him all over the world, performing and teaching across the US, Canada, Central America, Europe, and Asia. He has toured and performed with some of the biggest names in jazz, including Danilo Perez, John Patitucci, Joe Lovano, George Garzone, and Luciana Souza.



Paul Birk is a freelance trombonist and composer/arranger in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He has performed with or regularly performs with The Dallas Jazz Orchestra, C3 Big Band, John Wasson's Strata Big Band, Memphis Brass Big Band, Metroplexity, and the Rebel Alliance Jazz Ensemble. In addition, Paul plays musicals regularly in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Eric Hitt is a multi-faceted, award-winning bassist who has received international acclaim. He was a semi-finalist in the 2021 ISB Jazz Competition and won an Outstanding Performance award in the “Graduate” category of the 44th Annual Downbeat Student Music Awards. He has had the privilege to perform with Ryan Kisor, Jeff Hamilton, John Beasley, Melissa Aldana, Kirk Whalum, and Kenny Werner.



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Have you renewed your TJEA membership?

Please email Heather Mensch at webmaster@tjea.org for your membership renewal link. Include your full name in the request. If you still have your membership link from last year, you may use that link to complete your transaction in PayPal.

Remember TJEA member benefits include:

Annual Jazz Director Symposiums

TJEA Newsletter -- 4 times per year

School Grant Program offering up to \$400 per program

Jazz information resources

Ongoing support of jazz education in Texas

A shared voice in the continued enhancement of jazz education



Carlos Averhoff, Jr is a Cuban native saxophonist, composer, band leader, educator, and recording artist. All About Jazz names Carlos "a dynamic fresh new voice on the saxophone" and the Latin Jazz Network portrays his playing as "quite extraordinarily expressive and beautiful," further adding, "Carlos Averhoff Jr. is a musician who is renowned as a virtuoso soloist." He has collaborated alongside well-known artists from the jazz scene and the Latin jazz scene including Bob Moses, Roberto Fonseca, Billy Pierce, drummers Louis Hayes and Jimmy Cobb, Cuban drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, pianists Jason Moran and Chucho Valdes, and saxophonists Dave Liebman and Greg Osby.

Tarleton State, founding member of The Texas A&M University System, provides a student-focused, value-driven education marked by academic innovation and a dedication to transform today's scholars into tomorrow's leaders. It is located 60 miles southwest of Fort Worth and offers degree programs to more than 14,000 students, emphasizing real-world learning experiences that address societal needs while maintaining its core values of tradition, integrity, civility, excellence, leadership and service. For more information on the Tarleton Jazz Program, visit www.tarleton.edu/jazz



Sparky Koerner Retires After Forty-Year Career

*Texas jazz educator and trumpeter, **Sparky Koerner**, a former president of both the Texas Unit of IAJE and later the TJEA, recently retired from the College of the Mainland in Texas City. I was fortunate to interview Sparky regarding his teaching and playing career and pleased to share that interview here. — John Goode, editor*

JG: Sparky, let's go back to the beginning. Where did you grow up, go to school, and start playing the trumpet?

SK: I grew up in Bellevue, PA a suburb of Pittsburgh. I started playing trumpet in the 4th grade and of course did that all the way through high school. The high school was a small suburban school with only 700 students in grades 7 thru 12. We had a wonderful band director, **C. Dean Streator**, who played with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as a percussionist. From my graduating class of 96 students, seven went on to have careers in music as teachers at all levels and a few as professionals in orchestras. I attribute Streator's influence as a major reason I wanted to have a career in music.

JG: Who were your musical influences during those younger years?

SK: Actually, one of my influences, that got me into playing the trumpet, was an album my father had, *Tutti's Trumpets*, with Salvador "Tutti" Camarata conducting. The trumpet players included Conrad Gozzo, Pete Candoli, "Shorty" Sherock, Mannie Klein, Joe Triscari, and Uan Rasey. Little did I know that I was listening to some of the best trumpet players in Los Angeles. If you've never heard this album it is available on CD.



I never met any of those influences when I was young but, fortunately, I was on stage with Doc Severinsen during the 1988 Galveston Jazz Festival with the College of the Mainland (COM) Jazz Ensemble.

JG: *I believe you were in the military...air force? Did that happen before or after college?*

SK: Yes, I joined the Air Force right out of High School. No, I did not play in the band. I was an Aerial Motion Picture Photographer. Lots of fun getting to fly in the back seat of jets such as F-4C, F-100, T-38 doing what was called photo chase. I worked in the photo lab and was fortunate to have some sergeants that had a combo playing in the airman and officer's clubs on base. I took my trumpet one evening and sat in and was later asked to join them. It was there that I first started to play tunes such as, Satin Doll, Misty, and Girl From Ipanema. Some of the same standards I perform today.

After the Air Force I went to Louisiana State University for my Bachelor of Music Degree and studied with **George Foss** who had played with the National Symphony in the late 50's through the mid 60's. He taught all the standard trumpet etude and repertoire material by Clarke, Wurm, Williams, Schlosberg, Koprash, Smith, Chavanne, Charlier, and more. I went to graduate school at North Texas State University (now UNT) for my Master of Music Ed Degree. While there I studied with **Leonard Candelaria** and **John Haynie**.

JG: *What was your experience like at North Texas?*

SK: I would say that North Texas is where I knew that I would be involved in jazz education. I was a student worker in the Lab Band office under **Leon Breeden**, director of the jazz program and director of the One O'clock Lab Band. Being around him and seeing how he ran the program, how he organized all that was involved with nine lab bands, was instrumental in my success as a teacher. I also had the opportunity to study under **Dan Haerle** (piano), **Jack Peterson** (guitar), and **Rich Matteson** (euphonium). Their instruction has been a strong part of my involvement in jazz over the years. I was fortunate to become a graduate assistant and directed the Nine O'Clock Lab Band and later the Seven O'Clock. Working with these fine students helped me learn about chart selection and rehearsal tactics that paid off over the years directing the COM Jazz Ensemble.

JG: *Did you teach other places before coming to College of the Mainland in Texas City?*

SK: I came to Galveston on a grant from the National Endowment on the Arts, Texas Commission on the Arts, and Galveston Cultural Arts. The job was as "jazz artist in residence". I went to various schools in Galveston and would work with small groups of students in the bands teaching the basics of jazz style and improvisation. I even did this in the elementary schools at the 5th grade level. I used the Orff instruments to get the students into improvising. I also worked with middle school students in a combo setting. I would stay at each school for eight weeks then on to another one. While doing this I was looking for a place to play and that is how I discovered the COM Jazz Ensemble and eventual teaching opportunities at College of the Mainland.

JG: *How did your most recent teaching duties contrast to when you began at College of the Mainland?*

SK: I started as an adjunct faculty in fall of 1981 directing the jazz ensemble, teaching a fundamentals of music class, and teaching private trumpet lessons. A music appreciation class was added in 1982 as well as a brass ensemble that I recommended because of all the brass players wanting to play in the jazz ensemble. The college decided to make the position full-time in 1983 and I had to apply again and felt lucky when I received the position.

When I went full time, I started teaching the theory classes, fundamentals of music, jazz ensemble, brass ensemble, and private brass lessons. The position stayed pretty much like that for a few years. COM had a woodwind ensemble directed by **John Wolfskill** at the time. He was also teaching music appreciation for the college.



Sparky solos with Dr. William Lee in 2004.

One Christmas I decided we should form a concert band from the brass and woodwind ensembles. I bought some generic Christmas music and we rehearsed and put on a concert. I really don't remember the year. I decided that we needed a concert band after that semester and that was the start of it.

In 1999 I became chairman of the Fine Arts Department. The brass ensemble was disbanded. My duties then were basically music theory, jazz ensemble, concert band, and lessons.



Author, educator, trumpeter, Chase Sanborn and Sparky in April 2006.

JG: *When did the COM jazz ensembles and combos start?*

SK: The Jazz Ensemble was in place when I started teaching. The group was started in 1972 when the Fine Arts Building was built. I took over the group in 1981 as an adjunct faculty member and have been doing it ever since. I believe I started the jazz combo in 1993. I was getting students that were interested in playing in the jazz ensemble but really were not ready for the literature we were playing. I didn't want to lower the music level of the experienced players in the jazz ensemble, so I thought the best thing was to get the less experienced students into a combo setting where I could help them with their style and improvisational skills. This really did help them prepare for the jazz ensemble. I also did it as a way to have a group of students that could go out into the community and do performances to help promote the music program. It is much easier to take out a 5-piece group instead of a 20-piece big band.

The jazz ensemble has developed into a mature experienced group of musicians. The personnel in the group come from all walks of life: dentist, refinery chemist, NASA engineers, active and retired band directors, semi-professional players, IT system analyst, and music store salesman. I believe that COM has one of the top community college jazz ensembles in the Houston area.

JG: *You have always been a faithful contributor to the TJEA newsletter with articles about your performing groups. In your articles I've been impressed with the great guest artists you've had at COM over the*

years. Do any of those performances stand out among the others?

SK: John, it has been great having the TJEA newsletter that allows us jazz educators to share what we are doing with our program with others in the state.

Guest artists are an important part of any jazz program because it allows the players in the group to be involved with a professional that shares their personal career experiences with the members of the ensemble. COM has been lucky to have shared the stage with quite a few guest artists. Trumpeter **Marvin Stamm** and pianist **Bill Mays** were two that shared not only their performing abilities but their knowledge of what it takes to make it in the music business. Others that were just like that included **Chris Vadala**, **Tony Campise**, and two of my college mentors, **Rich Matteson** and **Jack Peterson**.

Another that performed with the band was **Tom "Bones" Malone**. His humor kept the band laughing and his ability to play the piccolo, bari sax, trumpet, tuba, and of course trombone, all in one concert, was great. Of course, one of my musical highlights was when **Doc Severinsen** came to perform at the Galveston Island Jazz Festival in 1988. I contacted him to see if the COM Jazz Ensemble could do a few tunes with him and he agreed. At that point he was touring with his group *Faucets*, sort of an electric group, so we opened the first part of the concert at The Grand 1894 Opera House doing some traditional big band tunes. The second half was *Faucets*. Yes, that was a special concert for me and the COM Jazz Ensemble.



COM Guest artist, Chris Vadala and Sparky.



Tom "Bones" Malone prepares to solo with the College of the Mainland Jazz Ensemble, directed by Sparky Koerner, at 2013 JEN conference in Atlanta.

JG: *You're currently an Advisory Board member of TJEA and served two separate terms as president of the Texas jazz organizations, once with IAJE then later with TJEA. What strikes you as significant changes that have occurred either while you were president, or since, in Texas jazz education?*

SK: You're correct. I did serve as President of the IAJE Texas Unit back in 2001 and as president of TJEA in 2010. Both organizations have been instrumental in making jazz education in Texas a vital part of the total education system. The TJEA Jazz Symposiums that have been added over the years are a real addition to the organization. They provide students the opportunity to work with other students from different areas of the state and to have clinicians share wonderful information about playing their instruments, jazz composition, improvisation, and more. Of course TJEA was the driving force to get both the second All-State Jazz Ensemble and the Honor Jazz Ensemble added to the TMEA convention performances.

JG: *How many years were you the coordinator for the All-State jazz audition process? I know that was an incredibly time-consuming job which has changed over the years.*

SK: John, I did that from 1999 to 2010 taking over from **Bill Snodgrass** who I think did it over twenty years. When I first started as coordinator, students recorded their All-State auditions on cassette tapes. I remember the first year receiving close to three hundred cassette tapes at the college! I had to put an identifier code on each one and of course they were for all the standard instruments in the jazz ensemble. Then I had to get a group of clinicians to host a panel of five to judge the material.

Cassettes moved over to CDs and I think that helped the process in that there were fewer problems hearing the audition music and it was easier to move from track to track. Now everything is online. All the online forms and MP3s make the whole process easier. There is still the need for judges and it is great that many of the younger jazz educators are being involved. Support from TMEA has always been necessary and they have come through and given jazz good recognition at the convention each year with performances and clinics.

JG: *I know you continue to perform around the Galveston/Houston area in both jazz and classical groups, including the Galveston Symphony. Tell us a little about the jazz groups Jazz Sunday and Sparky's Jazz Express.*

SK: I have performed as principal trumpet in the Galveston Symphony Orchestra since 1980. It has always been my way of keeping up my legit chops. It can be a real challenge for me at times but then again who doesn't like a challenge.

I formed *Sparky's Jazz Express* when I moved into the area in 1980. When I moved here to work with the Galveston Arts Council as a "jazz artist in residence" it was along with others in dance, creative writing, and photography. I felt the need to have my own group, so I found some local musicians that had an interest in jazz and we started having jam sessions at the Galveston Arts Center. This allowed me to meet other players like drummer **Bobby Adams**, pianist **Ted Wenglinski**, and bassist **Randy Haak**. The four of us performed on the Colonel Paddlewheel Boat in Galveston starting in 1985 during their dinner cruise and had a good run till around 1994.

I met **Richard Birk** who formed *Jazz Sunday* in 1990. The group included Richard-trombone, **Brian Casey**-bass, **Tom Borling**-piano, **Ben Atkinson**-drums, and in the beginning, **Warren Sneed**-woodwinds. When Warren took over the jazz program at Houston's HSPVA **Johnny Gonzales** replaced him and we added vocalist **Ellen Rogers**. We play various church services in the Houston area, and I love playing with these guys. *Jazz Sunday* does have four CDs with music arranged or composed by Richard.

Trio Du Jour is a group I started playing with six years ago at the Tremont House Hotel in Galveston. I can usually be found there on weekends with **Leah Stonum**-piano and **Mel Drybrea**-bass.

On Sunday's you can find me with Tom Borling at Marais Restaurant in Dickinson playing for their jazz brunch. I get calls for various gigs, such as solo trumpet at weddings and, prior to Covid, I have been known to take my music to senior care centers playing with play-a-longs doing big band favorites for the residents.



Sparky's Jazz Express at Texas City Arts Fest 2017.

JG: *I believe in the 1990's you were involved with the Galveston Island Jazz Festival. That festival is no longer active but do you foresee it ever being revived?*

SK: The Galveston Island Jazz Festival was formed in the mid-1980's by a group of music lovers and business people who wanted another event in Galveston. It was first held the first week of November and for the first few years all went well. Then one year a cold northern blew in and even though the show went on, it was decided to move the event to October. Again, for a few years the weather was beautiful for the event. It was great because, as the Executive Director for a few years, I invited many of the area community colleges and high schools to come and perform. For a few years we had over 300 musicians performing over a three-day period on three stages. The festival worked in conjunction with The Grand Opera House and they brought in major artists such as **Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Morgan, Tom Harrell, Phil Woods, Ellis Marsalis, Diane Schuur, and Doc Severinsen.**

The ending of the Galveston Island Jazz Festival was because of major rainstorms that came on the day of the paid events. Friday was always free and Saturday and Sunday were days we charged admission. But the event ended up going



With Marvin Stamm (center) and Robert "Doc" Morgan.

under financially due to the weather. Having the bad weather happen two years in a row caused many to just lose interest in volunteering. There has been an event at Galveston's Moody Gardens in the past few years associated with smooth jazz musicians. I believe the Red Cat Café was involved with the sponsors. I don't think the people involved with the Galveston Island Jazz Festival in the past would resurrect the festival.

JG: *You have some younger family members who are trumpet players, too. Do you ever get to play together?*

SK: My son, Aaron, is a trumpet player and when he went to COM for a computer science degree in the early 90's he played in the jazz combo and big band. He just came back this past

fall and played the jazz chair in the jazz ensemble. Both of his children are trumpet players in the Shadow Creek High School program in the Alvin ISD.

In the COM Jazz Ensemble I also had a father/son duo in the saxophone section last year. **Theron Sharp**-tenor saxophone, is a band director in the Alvin ISD and his son **Matteo**, an All-State alto saxophone player at Friendswood High School, played baritone saxophone this past semester in the band.

My son, Aaron, and I do a few gigs together now and then for churches when we get the call. Aaron has played with the *Suspect*, and *Clouseaux* and *Craig Kinsey* in Houston.

JG: *Having been involved so strongly with the TJEA and IAJE, what are your observations about jazz education in Texas and do you have any suggestions, wishes, or concerns you'd like to mention?*

SK: I believe that Jazz Education in Texas is as strong as any other state. The support from TMEA has been good. The creation of a second jazz ensemble and Honor Jazz Ensemble is great. The number of clinics at the TMEA Convention has been strong over the past few years and I love that they bring a military jazz ensemble to perform. I guess the one area that is still trying to build it's presents is the vocal jazz area. I know that there are some strong vocal jazz high school and college programs in the state and having them represented more would be good. People like **Paris Rutherford** and **Sue Cruise** have been important for vocal jazz in Texas.

JG: *What will the retired Sparky Koerner do with his time when the next school year starts and he doesn't have to report to campus?*

SK: I have loved working at College of the Mainland the past forty years. I will miss sharing my musical knowledge with the students. I will also miss the members of the fine arts faculty, many have been there from ten to twenty-five years themselves. I have been chairman for the past twenty years and I will not miss the extra paperwork involved in that position.

Unfortunately, the college is not filling my position at this point and was going to cancel the jazz ensemble. I just could not see that happening. Many of the players have ten years or more in the band and two members, **Ken Kirk** and **Ted Williams**, have been in it since I started directing the group in 1981. So, I have decided to keep the group going as a Community Jazz Ensemble as a Continuing Education Class.

I will continue playing with all the groups I mentioned earlier. I am not a big handyman but I do have a few projects around the house that I will tackle and hopefully be successful with them. I have a wonderful wife, Debbie, and we will see how things go with me being retired and then get her retired also. Then, maybe do a bit of traveling to see family up north where we are both from. Life is what one makes it and I plan to make it be as good and wonderful as I can.

JG: *Sparky, thank you for agreeing to this interview and for your years of service to jazz education in Texas and to the Texas Jazz Educators Association. Best wishes to you going forward.*

SK: John, thanks for asking me to do this interview. I wish nothing but the best for TJEA as it continues to be a vital force in Texas jazz education.



Ka-Ching!

You could have \$400 for your jazz program! Why haven't you applied!

TJEA provides jazz grants for Elementary, Middle School, and High School Programs. The grants have been increased to \$400 and will go to at least 10 school programs for clinicians, educational materials, or other program needs.

The deadline to apply is October 1st.

You must be a member of TJEA to apply.

****From the 'Resources' tab on the [TJEA.org](https://www.tjea.org) website, scroll down to 'Grants'.****

2022 JEN Conference Returns to Dallas

By Matt Sawyer

In the upcoming Jazz Education Network (JEN) Conference, to be held in Dallas in early January, Texas will have incredible representation with invited groups across the state: **Waltrip HS - Jesse Espinosa**, director; **Plano West Senior HS - Preston Pierce**, director; **Paschal HS - Matt Sawyer**, director; **Kinder HSPVA Combo I - Warren Sneed**, director; **Vela MS - Erika Uribe**, director; **Greater Dallas Youth Orchestra Jazz - Kris Berg**, director; and **Metro Praise Youth Orchestra/Keller Area Youth**



Jazz Orchestra - Gary Phillips, director. This may be an incomplete list at this time. We hope to know the complete schedule of performances by the October newsletter. Congratulations to all!

Attending the JEN Conference is a special one-of-a-kind event for your students. Being a member of JEN provides more materials, opportunities, workshops, and scholarships every year. For more JEN information, visit <https://jazzednet.org/>



Our annual Symposium returns — live in San Antonio — on Wednesday, February 9th, at the beginning of the TMEA convention and will be spearheaded by President-elect **Matt Hedrick**. This promises to be an incredible reunion of tremendous jazz minds and educators to bring you a day you can't afford to miss! Put February 9th on your calendar and be there for all the morning and afternoon clinics, conversation, and camaraderie.

Thoughts on Teaching Jazz

By Matthew Sawyer

I want to share what teaching jazz has given me this first week back. I came in with '*momentum*' as did my students. Even though we had just come off a very short summer for the students and teachers in our district — our last day was June 20th — I gave my jazz students their typical summer assignments with high expectations for the first day back. I did hold them accountable right as I promised them I would on the first day.

We had three summer jazz hangs, for anyone in town, which were half days of **playing together** as a band. They were very casual with the last half of the day being small group or individual listening sessions on the All-State jazz etudes and improvisation. I told them on day one, "I have been waiting for this day for so long, since June 20th!" then immediately counted off the warm-up we play every day followed by some new additions to it. Reach out to me if you'd like a copy and I encourage you to tweak anything you want to fit your band. I have a wonderful chromatic two-octave warm-up I learned from **Christopher Dorsey**, director of the Dillard Center of the Arts in Florida called "Spiderweb". We established this routine to start class right away, including the students setting up the band and not playing during the listening music which plays as they walk into the room. As little as all these things seemed, they really added up and gave us the *momentum* that we needed to really hit the ground running.

Our second day back we had the day off from marching rehearsal so we had what I call a Monthly Jazz Extravaganza--a monthly evening rehearsal outside the school day that could offer more creative rehearsal and listening opportunities, as well as give any guest clinicians more time with the band. I call it a 'jazz extravaganza' to avoid the word rehearsal and to imply having more fun than a regular class day! I wanted to go ahead and start right away in late August to give us that *momentum*. During the extravaganza we start the same way with our warm-up but extend it a little or try a few new things, including having more students solo. We then can send one group out to have a sectional for a bit, and I usually do this with saxophones to allow me to work with brass and the rhythm section. If we have another staff member nearby, they can pull individuals to work on the All-Region jazz music. Once we get to the music, we really dive in to details. Sometimes we provide snacks on short breaks and the students can socialize. But these breaks are pretty short. The students know we have a lot to do!

One unique thing I tried recently was a discussion table where everyone collectively has an opportunity to do score study. The Ellington chart, *Ring Dem Bells*, was our focus on this trial run and it was a lot of fun! This particular score is more a transcription of the original recording so I played it over the speakers, they followed along, and then we discussed stylistic things they noticed. Students were provided highlighters, pencils, and pens to mark the chart with those notes. We then listened to an alternate take that had a few subtle differences, discussed again, and then listened to a live version that was very different. I can't wait to try this again! To end the extravaganzas we play something fun and familiar, open it up for solos, and then call it a night.





Paschal HS jazz students engaged in score study during a 'discussion table' session.

Prior to the extravaganza, students were already saying, "Why can't we have more or meet more?" Afterward, there was buzz about them setting up their own sectionals and hang time. I am so happy they (and me) are having a blast! We continue to dig deep and are gaining *momentum*.

Also, on everyone's plate are the All-Region Jazz auditions in just a couple of weeks. To get ready, we have listening signups. We start those over the summer. I used to require these, trying to listen to every student in the program multiple times which meant shorter sessions. However, I am finding more success over the years scheduling several times when there is practical availability, making the sessions about 30-45 minutes, and eliminating the attendance requirements. My students have commented that, although they may be fighting for my time, this method is more meaningful, relaxed, and highly beneficial. I agree! I'm seeing more progress, I can really focus on the students' growth during the longer sessions and really get something done!

On our third and final time together that first week we focused on pure fun. I always want the kids to clap and sing but that day I had the students do it in pairs in front of the band. One student sang a line through a little megaphone and the other student echoed it back or played something conversational on their instrument. It was a blast! All of this was done on one of our tunes and the rhythm section played the whole time, even when it was their turn to participate. Next we sight-read a lot, talked building ensemble and listening skills, and kept our routine while trying things that might have looked like controlled chaos to an onlooker.

I recognize that, in Texas, teaching jazz takes many forms. A lot of schools do not have a jazz class so they rehearse outside the school day. Some programs cannot meet until marching season has finished. Some, despite challenging facilities and available time, find all kinds of ways to rehearse together and they make it work for their program and school. Only you can really know what will work for your situation and you will know this better than anyone as you grow your program and get to know your kids really well. What

Continued...

we all have in common is this, we want to teach this music and we want to do it well. It starts with creating a culture of responsibility and confidence. It's about finding the right repertoire that really fits your band and your environment.

One reason I love Duke Ellington's music is because I can find something for many levels that fit my groups, middle school or high school. His music helps me build more confidence and individuality in my players. I want every student to be celebrated for their individuality and their strengths. I also want every band member to learn the responsibility of their own part. You can do that with Basie's music and others. I love playing Mingus' music as well for that same confidence building, but Ellington's library, available through *Jazz at Lincoln Center*, has something for your 'stars', something for the ones that can become stars, and something for your kids that just love to be in band. Everyone in your group wants the opportunity to enjoy the experience and get better from it. Eventually, all kids know they can be a star. That's the magic of this music. When I hear an *Essentially Ellington library** tune, I imagine my band kids playing those parts. I look for as close to a 'lock' as I can find. When I find the right musical fit for my students, even if it's a risk, it almost always works out. If it doesn't, we move on and learn from it.

Here's an example of the right fit. There's an Ellington tune called *VIP's Boogie* and it starts with a baritone saxophone solo then goes into a blues shuffle. You can really open this tune up for solos. There's also a lot of great reference recordings of it. After the solo intro material comes a short saxophone soli with clarinet on lead. It is a very short tune with lots of ways to teach style. This was an amazing fit for my band a few years ago but this year it's not a good fit. Sometimes you pick a song that is almost a perfect fit in every way except it wouldn't work well for your rhythm section. So you move on. If your trombones are not strong you shouldn't go with a trombone feature. But, if there is a song with a challenging trombone part, and it's a great fit in all other ways, go with it and focus on teaching your musicians that challenging part slowly. Over time it'll work out.

Momentum! My program has a lot of it because Paschal High School is celebrating its 100th anniversary of band this year. I discover more and more neat history about our school every day. Find what momentum your school program has or even what momentum the students are having in their own lives.

We take time to celebrate that our kids are doing so much outside of band and the time is so precious when we can make music together in class. I don't know anyone who isn't humbled teaching this music and it's so incredible to learn from your kids as well as your mentors. I grew up being a small-group player and now I love big band so much more from studying it and getting absorbed in it, living it. It still feels brand new and I can't believe the long list of things I continue learning from it all.

I hope there is a wrinkle of something you can take away from this. I hope you can find the **momentum** in your own program and capitalize on it this year! — Matt Sawyer

***Essentially
Ellington**



A free program for high school jazz bands, *Essentially Ellington* aims to elevate musicianship, broaden perspectives and inspire performance.

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Rhythm Section Essentials

by *Richard Birk*

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This article is a guide for band directors who might have limited experience playing or teaching rhythm section instruments. It includes essential information and concepts with minimal elaboration but I would be MORE THAN HAPPY to fill in any gaps and answer questions if you would like to contact me directly.

Jazz Guitar Concepts

SOUND

- Avoid distortion and other effects, play with a “clean” sound.
- Use the front (body) pickup instead of the back (bridge) pickup.
- EQ using less highs and more mids & lows.

When comping...

- Minimize using the outer strings (1st & 6th strings) and emphasize the inner strings (2nd thru 5th strings).
- Pluck with the fingers instead of strumming with a pick.

VOICINGS

- There are four families of 7th chord qualities – major, dominant, minor, and half-diminished (min7b5).
- Basic voicings typically are built with the root on the 6th, 5th or 4th string.
- Consequently there are a basic dozen voicings that jazz guitarists should know. (4 chord families x 3 strings = 12 basic voicings).

“BASIC DOZEN” 7TH CHORD SHAPES

MAJOR 7THS

F MAJ⁷ **B^b MAJ⁷** **E^b MAJ⁷**

DOMINANT 7THS

F⁷ **B^{b7}** **E^{b7}**

MINOR 7THS

F MIN⁷ **B^b MIN⁷** **E^b MIN⁷**

HALF-DIMINISHED

F[#] MIN^{7(b5)} **B MIN^{7(b5)}** **E MIN^{7(b5)}**

Jazz Piano Concepts

TECHNIQUE

- Rarely (so let's say NEVER) use the sustain pedal.
- Don't arpeggiate (roll) chords.

VOICING

- 3rds & 7ths are the essential chord tones.
- Stay out of the bass player's territory (avoid roots & low register).
- Shell Voicings (*primarily used in the left hand*)

3 7 9
7 3 5

SAMPLE MA7 LEFT HAND SHELL VOICINGS (CIRCLE OF 5THS)

(Practice with Dom7 & Min7 Quality as well)

STARTING W/ 379

Handwritten musical notation for MA7 left hand shell voicings starting with 379. The staff shows four chords: CMA7, FMA7, BbMA7, and EbMA7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 3rd, 7th, and 9th of each chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

STARTING W/ 735

Handwritten musical notation for MA7 left hand shell voicings starting with 735. The staff shows four chords: CMA7, FMA7, BbMA7, and EbMA7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 7th, 3rd, and 5th of each chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Bb BLUES LEFT HAND SHELL VOICING

STARTING W/ 379

Handwritten musical notation for Bb blues left hand shell voicings starting with 379. The staff shows five chords: Bb7, Eb7, Bb7, Eb7, and Bb7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 3rd, 7th, and 9th of each chord. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb).

Handwritten musical notation for Bb blues left hand shell voicings starting with 735. The staff shows five chords: Bb7, G7, Cmin7, F7, and Bb7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 7th, 3rd, and 5th of each chord. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb).

Comping

STARTING W/ 735

Handwritten musical notation for Bb blues comping starting with 735. The staff shows five chords: Bb7, Eb7, Bb7, Eb7, and Bb7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 7th, 3rd, and 5th of each chord. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb).

Handwritten musical notation for Bb blues comping starting with 735. The staff shows five chords: Bb7, G7, Cmin7, F7, and Bb7. The notes are written in the bass clef, with the 7th, 3rd, and 5th of each chord. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb).

Concepts for Guitar & Piano

- Guitar & piano should avoid comping at the same time in improv sections.
- No need to play every chord in full ensemble passages.
- In swing, comping is led by the piano.
- In rock, comping is led by the guitar.
- Consequently in swing, the guitarist should allow significant space (silence!) when comping and should defer to the piano.
- In Latin styles, the guitar functions more like a percussion instrument.

SWING COMPING RHYTHMS

"FREDDIE GREEN" "CHARLESTON" CHARLESTON VARIATIONS

2 MEASURE PATTERNS

LATIN COMPING RHYTHMS

2-3 CLAVE 3-2 CLAVE

2-3 RHUMBA CLAVE 3-2 RHUMBA CLAVE

PARTIDO ALTO VARIATION

Jazz Bass Concepts

STARTING A BEGINNER BASS PLAYER

- Strong Sense of Rhythm – Correct rhythms and steady tempo (*more important than right notes*)
- Ability to Read Bass Clef – Consider trombone, bassoon, baritone, tuba, cello, and/or piano players
- Recruit from orchestra

SOUND

- Picking/plucking location (electric)
Closer to bridge = cleaner; Further up the neck = mellower
- EQ - Too much bass = muddy; Too much treble = thin, noisy

WALKING BASS LINES FROM CHORD SYMBOLS (SWING)

- "The Basic Formula" (*Alternate between the following chord tone patterns.*)
1 2 3 5
8 7 6 5
- Chord/Scale Relationships
Maj7 = Major scale (*occasionally Lydian*)
Dom7 = Mixolydian (*occasionally the altered scale*)
Min7 = Dorian (*occasionally natural minor*)
Min7(b5) = Locrian

SAMPLE WALKING BASS LINE ON B_b BLUES USING "THE BASIC FORMULA"

STARTING W/ 1235

STARTING W/ 8765

LATIN/BALLAD BASS LINES FROM CHORD SYMBOLS

- Primarily use roots, 5ths & octaves
- Primary rhythms =  or 

SAMPLE BOSSA/SAMBA/BALLAD BASS LINE

Jazz Drum Set Concepts

SWING (Listen, LISTEN, LISTEN!)

- Swing timbre is concentrated on cymbals – ride & hi-hat (while rock focuses on kick & snare).
- Start with quarter notes on ride and hi-hat on beats 2 & 4. (Ex.1)
- Add 8th note variations on ride – no more than two 8th note pairs per measure (with at least one quarter note in between). (Ex. 2 – 8)

- Snare – add “rim click” on 2 or 4 (NOT both)

- Swing time - no kick, ever!....at least to begin with (feathering is a more advanced concept/technique)
- Swing fills should use mostly snare - avoid toms.
- When setting up band hits that occur either on or off the beat, play snare or kick on the preceding downbeat.
- Use snare, kick (and occasionally closed hi-hat) to match short sounds in the ensemble and cymbals (and occasionally kick, toms) for long sounds.
- In Swing – walking bass supplies time so drum set has more freedom.
- In Rock/Funk – drum set supplies time so bass has more freedom.
- Ballads – use brushes on a coated snare head.
- The “emptiness” on a ballad is filled by piano (not drums!).
- If you’re not a drummer, notate/sequence some drum patterns/grooves to get a feel for “playing time”.

LATIN



Overall Rhythm Section Concepts

SETUP

- Set drums close to the big band with drum throne even with trombones.
- Bass amp near hi-hat or ride cymbal - (can trumpets hear bass?)
- Guitar & piano need to be near each other for comping compatibility.

GENERAL

- Each instrument has its role. Stay in your lane!
- Solid time is more important than “chops”.
- Practice with a metronome!
- Volume issues are many times more about “space” and “busy-ness”.
- Encourage jam sessions/rhythm sectionals.

I hope this info helps. Email me at richard.birk@brazosport.edu if you have ANY questions.

Final thought: I would rather hear a band with a cooking rhythm section and mediocre horns than vice versa.



TJEA NEWSLETTER ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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